

QUESTION ON NOTICE

No. 883

asked on Thursday, 13 August 2020

MR D LAST ASKED THE MINISTER FOR NATURAL RESOURCES, MINES AND ENERGY (HON DR A LYNHAM)—

QUESTION:

With reference to the efficient use of irrigation water by Queensland's horticulturalists, large amounts of allocated water not being used in any particular year and allocations for future years not being adjusted to take this into account—

Will the Minister advise what steps are being taken to ensure that irrigation water is allocated correctly based on recent use, rather than the current system which is inefficient and restricting the growth of Queensland's horticultural sector?

ANSWER:

Under Queensland's world-leading water management framework, water users hold secure, tradable allocations. The rules for managing these water allocations are transparently set at environmentally sustainable levels through statutory water plans. Queensland always assumes potential full entitlement use when announcing allocations annually.

The security and certainty that this framework provides to water users allow Queensland's primary producers to plan for the optimal economic management of their individual enterprises, without the risk of their water being taken from them.

Under the Queensland water planning framework, primary producers also have access to a water market, allowing them to buy or sell water on a temporary or permanent basis to support their businesses. New enterprises that are looking to invest in high-value activities can gain access to this natural resource through the water market in many parts of Queensland.

Underutilisation of water entitlements can occur for a range of legitimate reasons—for example, water users holding more allocations than they are currently using, to provide for future growth (e.g. waiting for tree crops to mature and reach full water demand) or to provide increased reliability during times of drought.

The Queensland Government will not support removing water allocations from existing water users irrespective of their level of current use, as such an approach would reduce confidence in Queensland's water management framework.

Instead, the Queensland Government is working with customers, including irrigators, to increase the utilisation of supplemented and unsupplemented water through encouraging voluntary participation in the water market.

This approach will build on existing initiatives that support access to the water market including the online *Water Entitlement Viewer* platform and the *Water Investor Hotline* phone service.

The Department of Natural Resources, Mines and Energy is continuing to progress and implement the *Underutilised Water Partnership Project* which is a collaborative cross-sectoral initiative that investigated the causes of underutilisation and provided recommendations on how to improve use of this valuable natural resource.